

“Jesus the Messiah accepted suffering according to his Father’s will”

We are in the second Sunday of Lent and we are looking at the theme of ‘Jesus the Messiah accepted suffering according to his Father’s will, and calls His disciples to follow him.’ In the Gospel passage that was read to us we see that Jesus and his disciples went to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. And as they were walking along Jesus asks them, ‘Who do people say that I am?’ The disciples say that some say John the Baptist and others say Elijah or one of the prophets. The point that is made is that Jesus was in line with one of the prophets of old. Elijah and John the Baptist had died but referring to them was an indication that they believed Jesus to be one of the great prophets. However, laudatory this may be it falls short of the truth about Jesus. There are many today who are willing to accept that Jesus was a great man or a great teacher or a prophet but they are not willing to accept him as God.

Jesus then presses the question on to the disciples, ‘But what about you? Who do you say that I am?’ Peter being the spokesperson for the group of disciples says, ‘You are the Messiah.’ Here the truth about Jesus as the Messiah is recognized and acknowledged. But what kind of Messiah were they looking forward to will unfold as we go along in the text. Jesus warns them not to tell anyone about this. Jesus knows that they had a different idea about His Messiahship. That Jesus is the Christ is the truth but it is not for open proclamation now. The popular enthusiasm for Jesus, and the hope that He would take up political leadership to set the Jews free from bondage to the Romans, was not the kind of Messiah He was going to be.

Jesus then teaches them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by all the chief priests and that He would have to suffer and that He would have to be killed and after three days rise again. The death that Jesus will undergo is not a tragic fate but rather something which was voluntarily accepted for the sake of the salvation of all humanity. The suffering of the Son of man is a necessary means for fulfilling the Messianic mission. Peter who also feels that Jesus must be a political leader rebukes Jesus when he says that the Son of Man has to suffer and to die. Peter rebukes Jesus for saying this but in return gets one of the sternest rebukes from Jesus. Peter’s rebuke was actually meant that he was asking Jesus to avoid the way of the cross. It was the same temptation that came to Jesus through the devil when the devil offered him all the kingdoms of the earth if only he would worship him and avoid the cross. Without the cross there is no salvation and therefore Jesus rebukes Peter sternly, ‘Get behind me Satan!’ You do not have the concerns of God but merely human concerns.

Jesus then says that whoever wants to be His disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him. Denying oneself means dying to the love of self, to the love of possessions, to the love of praise and to the love of power and to take up the cross.

To carry one’s cross was to deny oneself and to follow the path of suffering that Christ trod. The demand is a radical one. Jesus appears as the one to be followed, but that following has serious life and death consequences. While it may affirm eternal life it may lead to public confrontation with other human beings about him or the kingdom he announces. Coming immediately after his declaration about his own suffering, repudiation, and death, the sayings reveal how radically Jesus challenges those who would follow him. May we in this Lenten period be willing to deny

ourselves to the love of self, to the love of praise, to the love of possessions and to the love of power and take up our cross daily and follow him.

Rev.Dr. Paul Swarup

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